

From the Center for MH & Student/Learning Supports

## **Don't Limit Thinking about How Schools Can Best Help Address Students' Mental Health**

More and more reports are emphasizing the heightened concern for students' mental health, especially in light of the pandemic and the heightened concerns about social injustices.

### **That's all to the good . . . BUT . . .**

The first impulse seems to be to think mainly about adding more mental health resources (e.g., staff). Also there is a big push to expand mental health education and promote social emotional learning.

### **That's good . . . BUT . . .**

The nature and scope of need underscores how essential it is to move from a narrow focus on enhancing "school mental health" to *embedding mental health concerns into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports*. Such a system involves transforming how schools play a better role in addressing barriers to learning and teaching and reengaging disconnected students and families.

The current widespread adoption of some form of a multitiered continuum of interventions (commonly designated as MTSS) is a partial step in the right direction. That framework recognizes that a full range of interventions encompasses a focus on promoting whole student healthy development, preventing problems, providing immediate assistance when problems appear, and ensuring assistance for serious and chronic special education concerns.

Moving forward, our research has clarified the need to reframe each level of intervention in ways that systematically weaves together school and community resources. Districts and schools also need to rethink how they organize the practices they use for learning, behavior, and emotional problems. Our research indicates that the various programs, services, initiatives, and strategies can be grouped into six domains of classroom and schoolwide student and learning support. Organizing the activity in this way helps clarify what supports are needed in and out of the classroom to enable effective teaching and engaged student learning by addressing interfering factors.

We regularly hear from teachers and student/learning support staff that they feel overwhelmed by the increase in the number of students experiencing emotional, learning, and behavior problems. Given the immediate need for action, we recognize that schools must muster whatever they can to help. At the same time, we will continue to emphasize that addressing student mental health involves much more than that. See

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/morethan.pdf>